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PROGRAM The John Irving Show

STATION WRC Radio

DATE May 7, 1982 9:45 A.M.

CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT The Foreign Service

JOHN IRVING: Marguerite Michaels' book, "Showing the Flag." It'll make you mad or may teach you a few things, too. It's about our Foreign Service.

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IRVING: One thing we've got to get at, because there are inferences of it in your book, and certainly in "Missing" and certainly in "Diplomatic Immunity," which I read during a recent vacation and was profoundly upset by, and that is the almost total independence, to a frightening degree, of the CIA on station. The CIA officers, with the back-cable lines to Washington that the ambassador need not see. In the novel by Tad Szulc, the CIA officer actually operates against his country's interest, totally in his own interest and the CIA's interest, he says, and causes no end of upset. In "Missing," the CIA is implicated in many of the details there, and it is suggested that the CIA is highly involved in, in fact, the disappearance of the young boy.

What was your view of the CIA and its role relative to the embassy? And can the two coexist and both work for the interests of the United States?

MARGUERITE MICHAELS: Yes, of course, they can coexist.

IRVING: Do they?

MICHAELS: They did in -- I think they did in Bogota. But as the ambassador says in the book, it was such a defanged operation. And Washington just -- their feeling for Latin America was that the CIA agent -- and there were a handful in

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Bogota -- should be working and trying to infiltrate the Eastern Bloc embassy. So that when it came time to check out things like guerrilla rumors -- there were several rumors weeks before the hostage-taking that this was going to happen. And there was no one to check it out. There were not con -- I mean it was very frustrating. Like I said before, mentioned before, the CIA agents spent most of their time drinking with their counterparts in the KGB, again feeling rather meaningless.

And you had the wonderful situation where, of course, there was no CIA in Colombia.

IRVING: Yes.

MICHAELS: And everyone knew there was CIA in Colombia. And the Colombian staffers in the embassy jokingly called them the internos. And that was one name. The other name was overaged cowboys.

And I don't think those people had a shot of competence.